

University of Pennsylvania
Essay

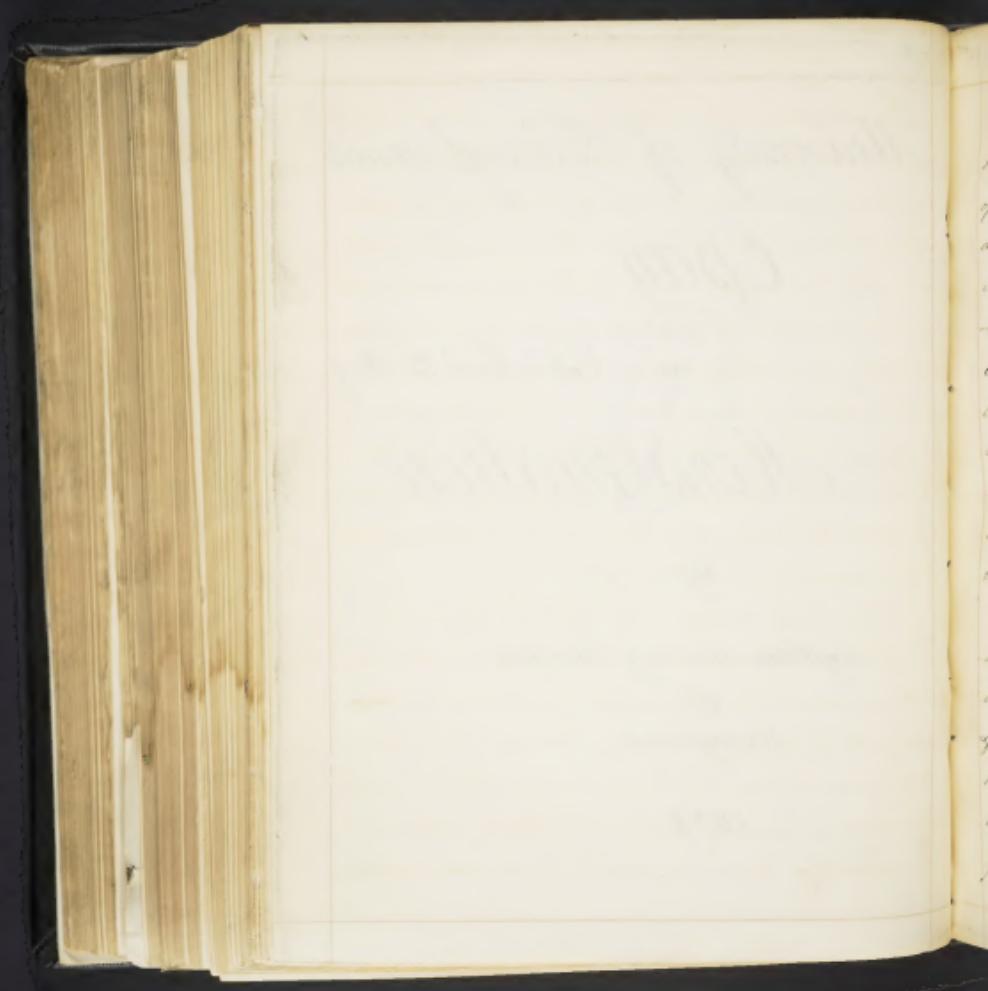
on Papd March 12 1829

Menstruation

by

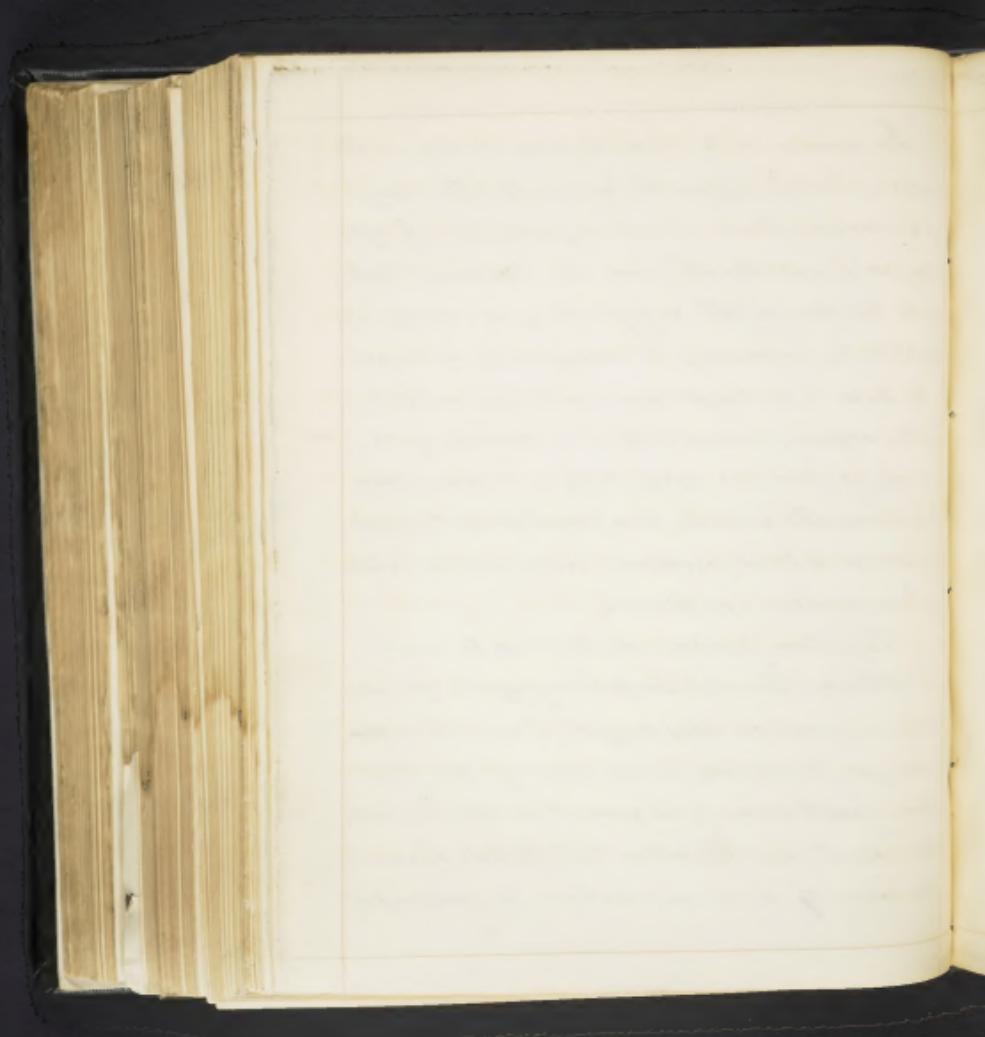
Lyttleton Murray Robertson
of
Maryland

1829



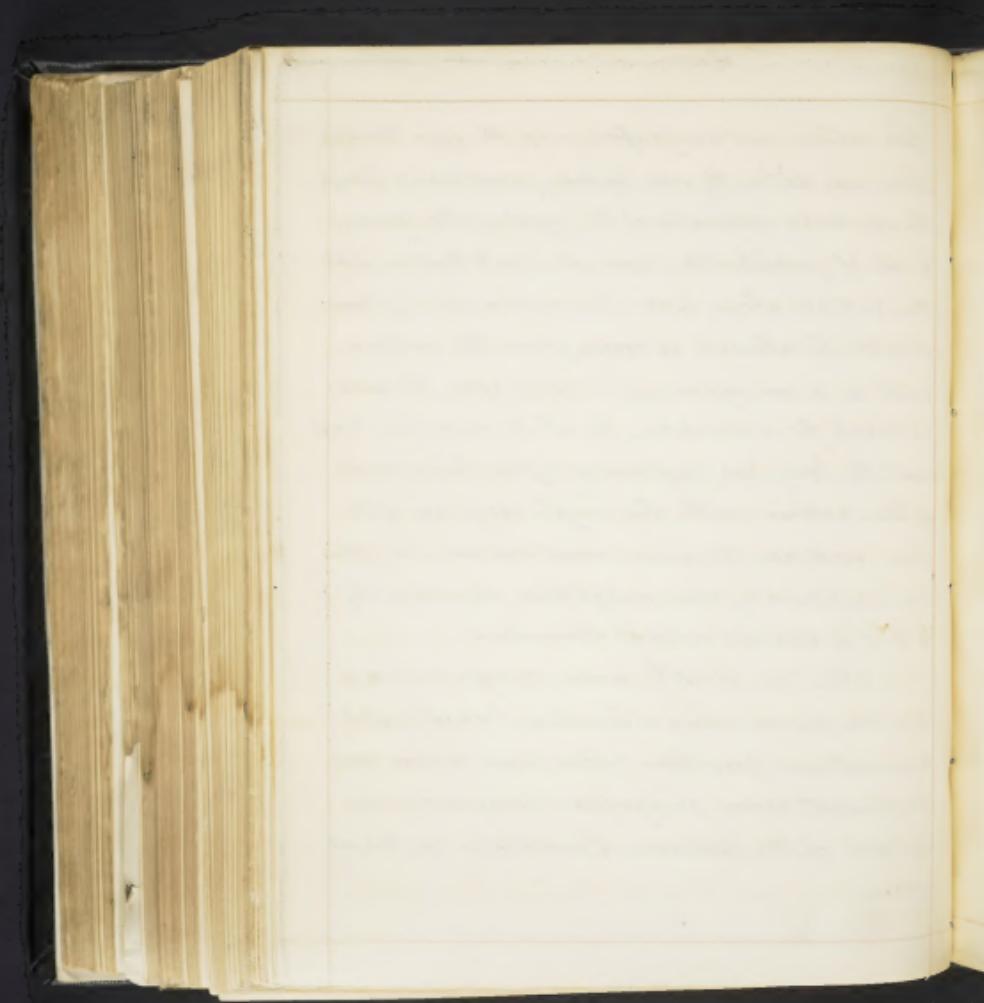
In unison with those who have written on this subject, I shall define the menses to be discharge of a coloured fluid, occurring every twenty-eighth day or lunar month, from the fibrous state unto the forty-fifth or fiftieth year; unless interrupted by pregnancy, its consequences, or disease. As there is no longer any contention relative to the organ from whence it is derived, yet a variety of opinions exists, whether it comes from the veins, the arteries, or a peculiar set of vessels adapted to that purpose, and further whether it be a secretion or blood.

Why those persons are disposed to receive Dr. William Hunter's and Morgagni's opinion only in part on this subject, I cannot imagine, for it appears to me that if they allow those Gentlemen to be correct in the one case, they must in the other. Dr. Hunter's character for veracity is unimpeached, for accusations of



observation not surprised, and he says this secretion, was distinctly seen by him, percolating through the contorted extremities of the vessels of the uterus, in a case of proctocystis; now it is well known that the arteries alone have this appearance, it must therefore be allowed to come from the arteries, and as a consequence, if it comes from the arteries, it must be a secretion, for all the secretions throughout the body are performed after this manner by the arteries, with the single exception of the Liver, and even the veins which execute this office are considered by some enlightened physiologists, to be of a decided arterial character.

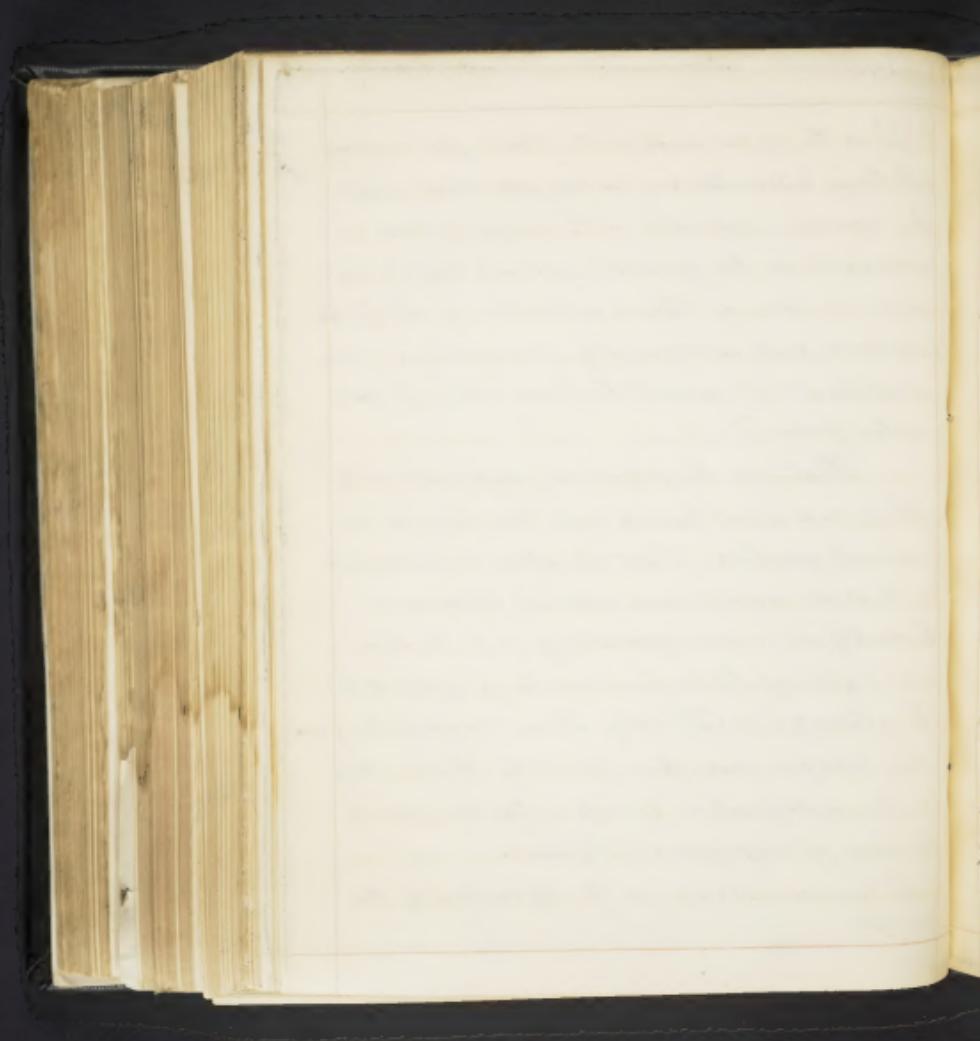
As it is of little moment, who first suggested the menses being a secretion, I shall pass it over without further notice and adduce such arguments as my judgement may direct, in support of the opinion I entertain on this subject.



Does the appearance of this fluid offer no proof
of its being a secretion? if so why does it not possess
the common properties of the mass of blood as it
circulates in the general system; that it is insi-
cient in some of these is admitted by all however
induced and consequently if wanting in these
constituents it cannot be blood although claim-
ed from it.

What are the physical properties of this
fluid, and what bearing will they have on the
present question; First its colour is intermediate
to that of venous and arterial blood.
Secondly its never separating into the elemen-
tal parts of blood however long exposed to
the atmosphere. Thirdly its not coagulating even
when kept for years. And fourthly its not taking
on the putrefactive process as has been proved
by cases of imperforate Hymen.

It has been stated in the definition of this
secretion,



that it is in the first place elaborated at puberty, or in other words that it is the proportionate effect of this state, for whatever may be said to the contrary, no woman has ever been fruitful without menstruating; although it may have been somewhat modified in appearance and colour.

The time when this fluid is first elaborated is in a great degree controlled by climate, constitution, &c. varying from the ninth to the twentieth year as it may be the lot of the female to inhabit the frigid northward the more genial southern climate; sooner in cities where relaxing luxury dwells, than in the rural cot of reason, here profid joys.

The evolution which at this time takes place is peculiarly interesting to physicians, and philosophers, who accustomed to admire, and decry nature's works, behold how admirably



she adapts her manner to the reverse statement of her
attire more readily. Suddenly the countenance of the
female undergoes a change, which is better un-
derstood than can rapidly be described; she
looks like unto a new being, fresh from the hands
of a heavenly Sculptor! with her voice more nu-
merous full and in tact her whole counte-
nance respires of health and youth, so far as the indi-
vidual man be susceptible of that state.

Whilst these mutations in the corporeal
system are going on the mind is not slatin-
g away. The consciousness of the boudoir are now
thrown aside, and reason assumes her empire.

The other signs indicating the approach
of the inveterate period are heat in the bulbus
of the eye, pains in the solar plexus, tetter
etc., diminished appetite, slight leucorrhœa,
itching sensation in the maxilla, which
may continue for an indefinite period,



subsequently a discharge takes place, which may be either the colour of which is not necessarily red, or between that of vinoous and external blood.

The continuation of this discharge is generally speaking from four to six days, and occurs with great regularity every twenty-eight day, from the time of their separation.

Whilst the flux lasts the appearance is languid, pale, or flushed, with a disagreeable dragging sensation about the hips and lumbar regions.

After this manner are the other forms of the eversion subject to this discharge, until the fortieth, or fifteenth year, when it becomes irregular as to time and quantity, and passes away no more.

The cause of this eversion is unknown, from which we have, at our present knowledge, yet no idea. Some have said, so far shall these glands be function, to close once has insensibility over



is impossible, but hardly man not content
with beholding effects, — out a knowledge of
their causes, has framed a variety of opinions
in account for, that, the knowledge of which
would avail him caught.

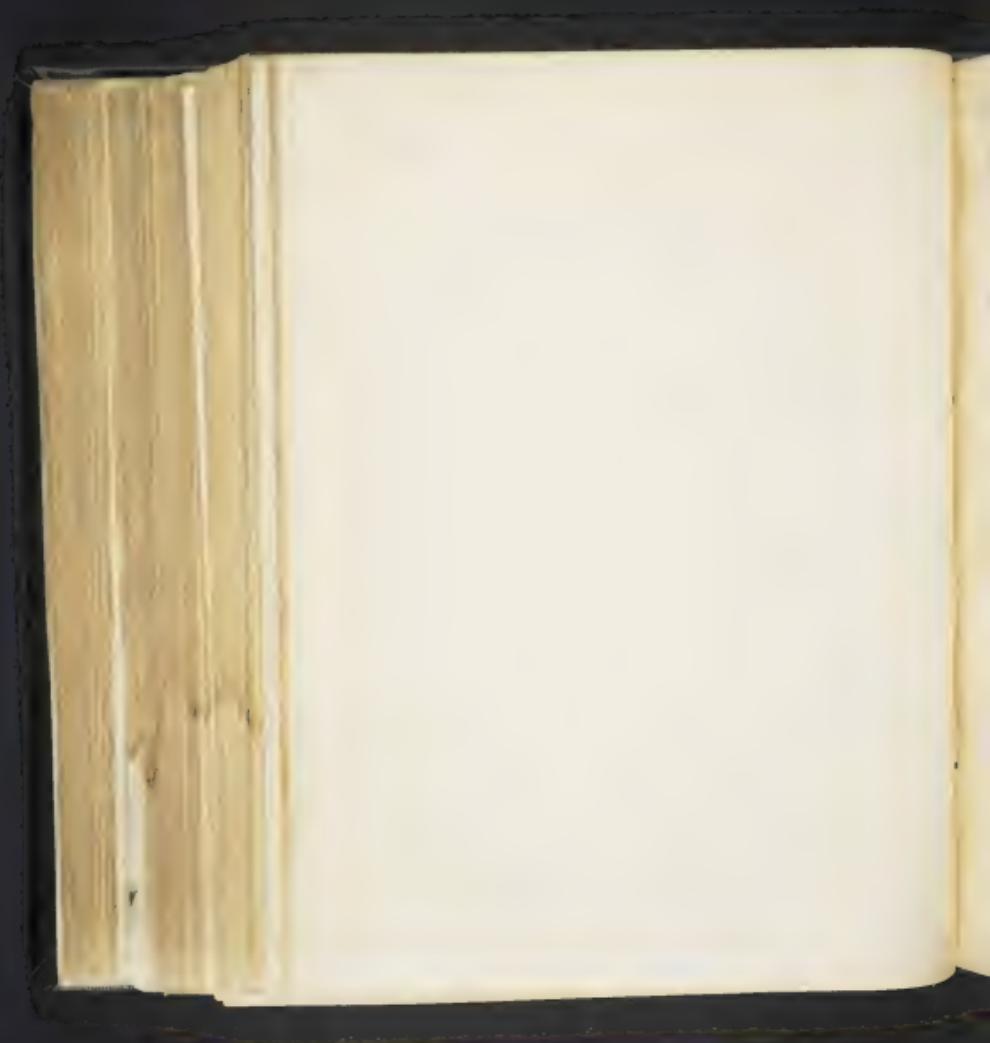
I will take a cursory ^{new} of some of those
which have been thought all sufficient to induce
this discharge; the first that arrests my attention
is that of Lunar influence; the effect which this
changing luminary has upon the tides, first
attracted the attention of the author of this
~~hypothesis~~, which has no other basis than the
periodicity which this reasoning observes, least
to the winds this reasoning, it is but necessary
to state that which the ignorant are accus-
ed with, which is that women are menstruating,
on every day, and hour, throughout the year.

The doctrine of general plastron has
much greater claims to our consideration.



Although this hypothesis is much more plausible than the one just mentioned. I hope to prove it to be, what in my belief it is, the basal fabric of a vision, with no other support ^{than} that which it derives from the inventive genius of its author.

For argument we will, for a moment admit what has been so rashly asserted by this theorist that women are more disposed to plethora than men, what tendency will this have? how will this substantiate what he so anxiously wishes? is plethora ~~merely~~ removed by hemorrhage; or is it not more frequently relieved by ^{any} excretion - the secretions, the latter opinion is, will always be the correct one, I believe, if it is not why does no woman return to most ticklish schemes from her plethoric state without the loss of a single droop of sweat, by the marked increase in some of their secretory functions, moreover, could not the great author of all



9

things have committed a work of supererogation
in making her so. Think it, yet this he maintains,
every thing is in responsive harm, every
thing has its adaptation to a peculiar end,
from the simple functions of the zoophyte, up
to those of the most complex man.

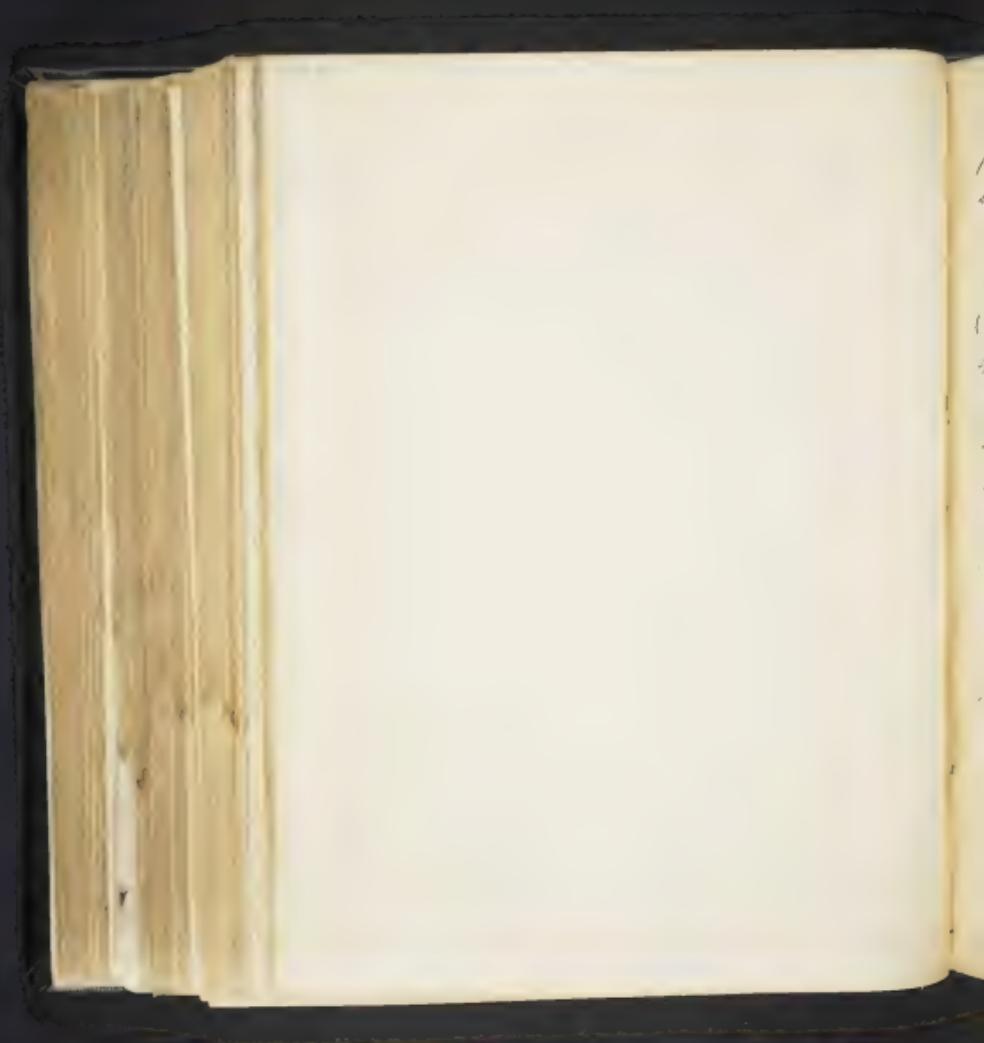
Again, if this plethoraic state is the cause of this
function, and is constantly present, why does
not venesection, reverse, the discharge? —
as in epistaxis and other hemorrhages; on the
contrary, it is well known that depletion carries
to a proper extent; in many instances, is wholly
necessary, as a corrective of it in suppression &c.

If I may be permitted to theorise I am
willing to allow there may be more blood
in the system of women during gestation
than in the absence of that state, and think
I can give some reasons as plausible as those
brought forward by the Author of the doctrine.



in proof of its existence, I do positively deny its
necessity, either prior or subsequent to the period.

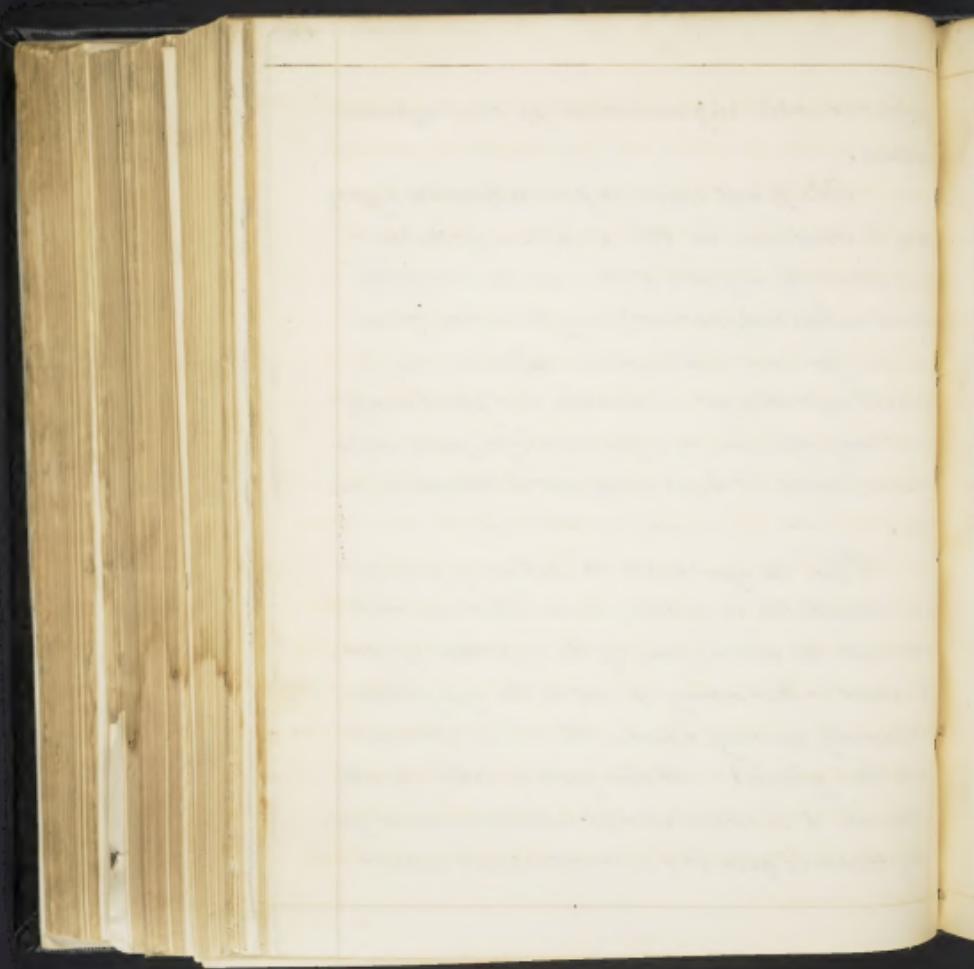
It is, palpable to every one, that women
are of a more full habit of body during the period
of pregnancy than at any other; consequently must
have a greater quantity of fluids circulating
in their systems. Now if there is an increase of
the contained fluid there must be an increase in
the caliber of the containing vessels, consequent
ly, if this increase occurs there must be a dilata-
tion in the coats of these vessels, which, owing
to their elasticity, admit of it without detriment
to a certain degree, the necessity of this increased
quantity, existing to obtain, the vessels contract
to their primitive size. So much may, possibly
be correct, I do not pretend to say that it positively
is, we at least know it to be the case so far re-
gards to the uterine vessels, or how is the increase
of blood contained in this organ without the



proportionable augmentation of their secretion volume.

The final cause so far as human agency may be concerned in this arcanum of nature (being absolutely requisite to the reproduction of the species as has been proved) may be hidden from our ken for some wise purpose ~~whatever~~ this may be I shall not attempt to develope, but shall merely state my opinion, by a few analogies, and comparisons, which I hope may not be thought misplaced.

When hunger exists the salivary glands are stimulated to action, or in other words to pour out the saliva, even by the expectation of food, to what is this owing if not to the sympathetic reciprocally existing between the brain, stomach and these glands? When food is taken into the stomach it is stimulated (or whatever name you may choose to give it) into action, and what



phenomena have you, the pouring-out of the gastric juice mucus &c. what are these fluids? they certainly are not blood, neither is the stomach a gland, yet no one can deny it a secretory power; these are its physiological functions.

I might go on with such analogies with the liver, the kidney, and in fact with every viscus it would hold good with all, what does this go to prove but that each organ has its peculiar stimulus to the impression of which it is susceptible in the exact proportion to the development of the organ in question. The application of this reasoning is obvious, the evolution of the actions takes place like that of other organs, consequently is susceptible of the full impression of its natural stimulus this acting is productive of maturation— Yet where am I! where has my subject borne me! far far beyond my depth or rather into a labyrinth I cannot retrace and through which I dare not proceed!

James